



A theme of nationalism in *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh in this historical fiction explores the consequences after the partition of India- Pakistan and the partition of Pakistan- Bangladesh. It presents how the social and religious culture has affected to the family and society.

Introduction:

The novel explores the concepts of history, freedom and nationalism and also criticizes the dramatic yet unrecorded consequences of historical events on innocent human beings. It highlights the absurdity of the national border we draw between people and nations, which serves as a source of enmity as well as horrific violence. Many subaltern voices are heard in this novel, as in Ghosh's prior works.

The Shadow Lines . . . became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them. ... I had to resolve a dilemma, between being a writer and being a citizen (Hawley, 60).

Ghosh tells the subaltern history of militant nationalists through Thamma's memories, focusing on how much they did and sacrificed for the freedom of their country. The grandma was inspired by the heroic stories of Khudiram Bose and she also wanted to fight for freedom. "Ever since she heard those stories, she had wanted to do something for the terrorists, work for them in a small way, steal a little bit of their glory for herself" (Ghosh, 39). As far as Thamma knows, there was another world on the other side of the border. In the novel Thamma is sure that real borders divide the countries. She is surprised when she hears that she won't be able to see a border between India and Pakistan when she flew over it. She asks, "If there isn't any difference, won't both sides be the same?" The hypothetical mapping of the nations by Thamma is similar to nationalism that is dependent on the things which unite the people.

The central character of the novel, Tridib, is also affected by the war. He saw a man and a woman being romantic in a bombed-out theatre in London. He remembers the event so well that he wants to have a similar scene of making love in a ruin. During this trip to London, Tridib just come to know May, who is just a baby at the time. Since 1940, Tridib has sent Mrs. Price a Christmas card every year to remind her of the time they spent together. When Tridib was 27 years old he starts writing to May, who is just 19 years old at that time. In his fourth letter to May, he tells her that he wants to make love to her in a ruin with the freedom of a stranger with no history between them, just like Isuelt, a beautiful woman loved overseas by Tristan, a man without a country and the hero of his iconic story, which is told by Mrs. Price's husband to him. Means to be able to recognize the contemporaneity of the past, to be able to see historical memory as vital to any understanding of the present, and to be able to see different times and places as inextricably intertwined with one's own (S. Kaul, 277).

The Shadow Lines also tells how the Partition affected to some of its characters including the grandmother, Saifuddin and Khalil. Thamma is rendered a foreigner when "in 1947 came Partition, and Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan. There was no question of going after that. She had never had any news of Jethamoshai and her aunt again" (Ghosh, 125).



The loving relationship between May and the narrator in the end of the book shows how boundaries between countries are made to be too rigid and how the concept of a nation based on the holiness of racial background is just a myth. When she gets back to Tha'mma after the Division of the country, she learns that her uncle Jethamoshai's family home is still on the same place. The grandmother, basically a sheltered from Bangladesh, learns that people like her don't have a roof anywhere except in their memories. But still very soon she would be the part of idealistic history when she decides to donate her gold chain to conquer the army of Pakistan to protect the liberty of nation: "I gave it to the fund for the war . . . for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out" (Ghosh, 237)."

The murder of Tridib shows that Tha'mma's nationalism doesn't give her liberty since it leads to frightening violence and individual sadness. At the end, she is angry and upset as what she sees nearby her does not match her sense of nationalism: "All she had asked from life was a stable middle- class life but history denied her even that (Chaudhary, 96).

The grandmother's questions about the division of the nation show that the rulers of both the nations made a mistake in history that made it harder for people to share their culture, way of life, memories, and dreams. The novel goes against the views of elite historians who stress the distinctions between Hindus and Muslims by showing, satirically, that Dhaka and Calcutta got along better after the Partition and that they were like a "inverted image" of each other. The Partition makes the grandmother a foreign person in her own country because her citizen status and birthplace are at odds with each other. In dilemma she tells she will "come home to Dhaka" rather than "go home to Dhaka." In Dhaka, an experience of the city and her family's old home makes her free from the impact of the most popular version of history. It was the first time in her life, she sees similarities between India and Pakistan, which shows that the shadow lines are only man made and based on geographical maps, not on real cultural aspects.

Jethamoshai's refusal to go to India with Tha'mma also shows how silly the shadow lines are: I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here. (Ghosh, 215)

Conclusion:

The Shadow Lines is an archaeology of subaltern voices that questions elitist history by showing its hidden and tragic effects on subalterns and by making the historical look fictional and the fictional look historical. It looks at the ideas of nationalism and freedom with the critical eye of a postcolonial subaltern historiographer and shows how silly and unfair they are. The Partition was one of the most dangerous periods in the history of our country. Thousands of people were killed in communal riots. A lot of trains were sent from India to Pakistan and Pakistan to India full of dead bodies. The film *Gadar* and the book *Freedom at Midnight* is the finest example of it. After a long period of communal riots finally two countries were geographically divided. With its many other themes and structural parts, the novel as a whole looks at the relationship between the dominant and the dominated from both opposing and complementary angles.

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